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TEACHING INDIVIDUAL NOTIONS

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We have our five formal steps for the inductive development of generalizations, and we have a similar series of steps for the deductive application of these generalizations to particulars. But as yet we do not have a corresponding series of steps or phases for the adequate development of the individual notion. Just as deduction was for a long time regarded as merely incidental to induction in teaching, so the learning of particulars is in educational theory even yet regarded essentially as incidental to the inductive exercise, and, in a lesser degree, to the deductive exercise.

McMurry,¹ while discussing the acquisition of individual notions under the step of presentation, makes the goal of instruction the acquisition of general notions, nevertheless, and the same may be said of De Garmo.² Strayer³ and Earhart⁴ in a measure, and again incidentally, include this topic under the teaching of appreciation, and Charters⁵ comes face to face with it frequently, calls it the "general" type of development, but nowhere gives it specific exposition. Parker⁶ develops and exemplifies a phase of this topic in his chapter entitled "Associating Symbols and Meaning," but only a phase.

The one noteworthy exception to this all but universal neglect of the logical aspects involved in teaching particulars is found in Tompkins.⁷ Tompkins devotes 73 pages to the development and exemplification of thinking the individual, and, although his treatment is masterful and well worthy of study, it has received but little

¹ McMurry, *The Method of the Recitation*, p. 51.

² De Garmo, *Essentials of Method*; also *Principles of Secondary Education*, Vol. II.

³ Strayer, *A Brief Course in the Teaching Process*, p. 78.

⁴ Earhart, *Types of Teaching*, p. 109.

⁵ Charters, *Methods of Teaching*, p. 417.

⁶ Parker, *Methods of Teaching in High Schools*, p. 122.

⁷ Tompkins, *Philosophy of Teaching*, pp. 109-82.

attention. For this neglect there appear to be at least two reasons. These are Tompkins' philosophy and style and the ultra and detailed logical state in which he left the matter.

But, as a matter of fact, is there a need for an exercise to serve as a guide in teaching particulars? Are we ever obliged to teach particulars in their own right as we are obliged to develop generalizations and to rationalize and foretell particular effects? And, if so, are these particulars ever sufficiently complex to require the aid of a logical outline in their presentation?

All of these questions, it seems, have to be answered in the affirmative. Particulars may form the center of attention quite as independently as generalizations or explanations, and do so far more frequently. The student of art wants to know Raphael's "Sistine Madonna," da Vinci's "Last Supper," and Millet's "Gleaners"; the student of literature wants to know Homer's *Odyssey*, Goethe's *Faust*, and Scott's *Ivanhoe*; the student of geography wants to know the Mississippi River, the African continent, and the earth as a whole; the student of history wants to know the battle of Thermopylae, feudalism, and the life and character of Washington; and so on through every other department of knowledge.

All these particulars need to be known as individuals. To be sure, in acquiring the knowledge, generalizations and explanations might be—indeed, would have to be—used, but so are individuals used in making and applying generalizations. Individuals and relationships never exist in isolation from one another, but either one or the other may be made the center of attention. When an individuality is regarded as primary, the relationships which play upon it do not disappear, but are regarded as secondary, while the reverse is true when relationships are regarded as primary. Looked at from the standpoint of the interrelation of its parts and attributes, an object is thought of as an individual organic unit, while, when it is looked at from the standpoint of its relation to other objects and events, generalizations and explanations are in the foreground of attention.

The interrelation of these two points of view may be exemplified by such questions as the following in reference to the Panama

Canal. From the point of view of individuality one may ask, What is the Panama Canal, i.e., what are its salient characteristics? While from the point of view of relationships one may ask, Why was the canal built? How durable is the canal? or any one of a host of other questions.

In reply to the first question one would be given such data as the length, breadth, depth, location, origin, and purpose of the canal, all of which together would give one a meaningful concept—an individual concept—of the canal. In reply to any one of the second group of questions the particular relationship inquired about would be made to stand out. Clearly, any or all of these relationships might in a contributory manner be ferreted out also while one was engaged primarily in gaining a knowledge of the canal as a particular thing.

The question whether or not particulars are ever complex enough to require the aid of an outline in their presentation has no doubt been sufficiently answered by the examples given. Such things as the *Odyssey*, feudalism, the African continent, and the earth are certainly sufficiently complex. In fact, it is never a relationship, as such, but the individual in its aspects and parts, and as it is involved in relationships, that is complex.

The problem of developing a series of steps or phases that would be useful in teaching particulars, just as the five formal steps are useful in teaching relationships, may be approached by asking how we naturally proceed in learning the individualities that we meet in the affairs of life. How, for example, would you proceed, as a sight-seer and patriotic American, in gaining a knowledge of the city of Washington?

You would, of course, (a) have your problem; we can never get along without that. There would be some reason why you would want to know about Washington, for otherwise you would never of your own accord undertake to study it. Next (b) you would perhaps buy a guidebook and, with the aid of the map contained therein, you would gain a preliminary or outline view of the city, and next (c), perhaps following a fairly definitely conceived plan gained from the outline view, you would get down to the details. These you would visit one by one and study and enjoy

each again as an individual. This done, and while things were still fresh in your mind, you would perhaps (*d*) again sit down with your map and sum up, systematize, and fix the things you had learned.

The phases of the movement just exemplified, which are typical, may be summarized as follows:

1. Preparation—problem and setting.
2. Presentation:
 - a*) In outline.
 - b*) In detail, accompanied by interpretations, explanations, etc.
3. Organization and summary.

We have here a teaching exercise with three steps or phases, and with at least two subdivisions of the second step. The heart of the exercise is found in the second step, the presentation, for it is here that the knowledge which our aim or problem prompted us to seek is given. Because of this fact, after trying out and discarding three or four other terms, I have chosen to call this the *presentation exercise*.

What we have in the presentation exercise is our familiar movement from the whole to the parts and back to the whole again. An individual is unknown or problematic; it puzzles us. We attack it, first to survey it and then to analyze out and master its various parts and aspects, and finally we bring all the parts and aspects together again to give us once more our unified view. We have moved through analysis and synthesis from an individual that was interesting enough, but that was baffling and confusing, to an individual that is clear, unified, and meaningful, and therefore still more interesting.